

**HIGHLIGHTS OF SPEECHES GIVEN AT THE YEAR-END REGION LEADERS
MEETING, DEC. 5
FOR SGI-USA'S NEW BEGINNING**

**JAMES HERRMANN
SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION LEADER**

Good morning, everyone! Yesterday when we met as youth division, we had enriching dialogue and a great time. I really think we've reached a new era in SGI-USA. I completely believe it is President Ikeda's determination that is driving this new era for the 21st century. I was really proud to see the great capability that exists in the youth division. During our discussions with all the youth region leaders from around the country, it is clear that the youth are focused on creating an incredible momentum of propagation this coming year. Throughout the nation the membership of the youth division is really going to explode!

Yesterday, Mr. Wada encouraged us to always carry the *World Tribune* and use it at meetings. Taking Mr. Wada's advice, I want to read from the *World Tribune*. In it President Ikeda says: "It is always the courage and solidarity of youth that open a new world, a new age. When youth lose their sense of adventure, their spirit grows old and their lives become little more than a living death. At this time, that will never come again, I call out to you, my beloved youth, boldly leave behind an immortal history" (Dec. 10 *World Tribune*, p. 5). This March 16 will mark the first Kosen-rufu Day of the new millennium. With a sense of adventure, let's begin by creating a new history with total victory this March 16!

In President Ikeda's message to us yesterday, he said: "I ask each of you to exercise bold, confident leadership for the 21st century and to do so with earnestness and sincerity, with courtesy and daring" (see full text on page 1). Our women's and men's division leader's, Matilda Buck and Tariq Hasan, have always supported the youth. That's why I think that this is such a great time for the youth division to be bold and to really advance!

At the Los Angeles Friendship Center, there's a magnificent tile mural on the outside wall of the building. General Director Danny Nagashima had put me in charge of initiating this project earlier this year along with the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department. I didn't know what to do. It became a huge challenge to find the artist and to come up with the concept. It was a tremendous struggle. Finally, we were able to get the project approved through the Cultural Affairs Department. The end result was beautiful. The mural is based on President Ikeda's poem, "The Sun of *Jiyu* Over a New Land."

When I reported to Danny about the project, I was very proud. I thought that my job was done. I said: "Danny, we finally got it! We got our approval!" He said: "Oh, that's so great! That's the first step!" I said, "What do you mean, that's the first step?" He said that President Ikeda wrote the poem, "Sun of *Jiyu*," not just for the SGI-USA members, but for all the citizens throughout Los Angeles. He suggested, "Why don't you build a memorial in a public park in Los Angeles that will display President Ikeda's poem for the entire city of Los Angeles?" I was completely blown away. Then he said, "Why not have the city pay for it?" I had an incredulous look on my face as I thought, "How is that going to happen?" Danny just said his famous words, "Why not?"

Danny opened my eyes to a vision much grander than I had seen. I realized the reason he's able to do that is because he's daring, he's bold and he's constantly thinking of how to reply to our mentor, President Ikeda. It takes that kind of spirit and courage to open the

hearts of others. I would like to propose as youth that next year we be bold, we be courageous and we advance with this “Why not?” spirit! I firmly believe that for the youth division to really advance boldly, to have people stand up, it requires this “Why not?” spirit and the heart to always reply to our mentor. Thank you so much!

TARIQ HASAN
SGL-USA MEN’S LEADER

First, I want to express my deep appreciation to President Ikeda for giving me this opportunity to further my human revolution as the men’s division leader. Probably no one was as surprised as myself when I received this new responsibility and quite frankly, I have never felt so incapable in accepting a new responsibility as I did this time. How strange, I felt, that a person born in an Islamic country (Pakistan), and the last country to become a nuclear power in this century, could come to the U.S. and become the men’s leader of an American Buddhist organization! But then I thought that’s why this is America — a land that is continuously rejuvenated by its immigrants and of course also by the people who were born here. I am now ready to challenge this new responsibility with sincerity and daring.

This may sound strange to members of the other divisions, but until this week I just thought, “I’m a leader, I’m a man, so I’m a men’s division leader.” I thought that’s all there was to it. But in speaking with many men this week, I realized that we are very unique — we are not and can never be women’s division; we are no longer members of the young men’s division, although we should always be youthful. We are men and we should be proud to be who we are because we have President Ikeda as the ultimate example of a men’s division member.

As men, I believe we need to unearth those problems and difficulties that are unique to us, and I believe there are many — such as what is the role of men, especially as Buddhists in American society? What are the pressures that men face in their daily lives? How can our men’s division members truly become relevant — truly make a difference — and not be just an anachronism?

Matilda Buck mentioned how she wished the women’s meeting during this weekend could have lasted three days. Quite frankly, if that happened with our men’s meeting, we’d be in serious trouble. For the last two days, the men’s division leaders were very fortunate to receive guidance from Mr. Wada, who to me is such an unpretentious, caring and straightforward individual — three qualities that I believe we can all use. He told us over and over and over again to listen to and respect the women’s division. My new partner, Matilda, and I definitely pledge to do that. But more than just lip service, I want to create a great team with Danny and Matilda and James and Renu and Cory.

The second point Mr. Wada shared with us is to be uncomplicated. (I’m afraid I’ve already become way too complicated with this speech — I should have just read a passage from the World Tribune as Mr. Wada suggested.) This is my personal challenge, and I believe it shows Mr. Wada’s great insight into the character of many men. Again, I will be the first to become uncomplicated.

Having said all this, I believe the greatest mission we have as men is to help raise the youth division. President Ikeda can raise so many capable youth because he loves youth and because he understands their hearts so deeply. In his last speech to them when he was in the U.S. in February of 1990, he spoke about how difficult it is to be young because it’s a time of so many challenges, of so many uncertainties about careers and relationships.

When I heard that guidance 10 years ago, I was so moved by his profound compassion for the youth. I really ask the men to reach out to the youth—let's share our experiences of being a youth or, as someone said yesterday, we were all young once so we can really give them hope and courage.

Finally, I also am determined to introduce one person to this practice. I want to do it not because SGI-USA made a target and I as a national leader want to show you that I can do it. I want to do it because it is the greatest joy in the world. About two weeks ago, I ran into someone I introduced to Buddhism 12 years ago who stopped practicing and ended up in jail on a very serious charge. He told me the only thing that kept him going in jail in his darkest hour was chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I remembered when I shared the practice with him, he was very spaced out. I went to his house every morning at 6:00 to do gongyo for several months. When he stopped chanting, I felt so disappointed. But seeing him again and seeing that he was chanting once more rejuvenated me and woke me up to what the key is to this Buddhist practice, which is sometimes easy to forget, especially after we've been here for four days talking for so many hours.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity. I know as men we are ready to move, not because of me but because of the great leadership team we have in the men's division—Greg Martin and George Kataoka, Ronnie Smith, Ian McIlraith, Steve Saperstein, Mike Golden, Eddy Yamane and Chuck Williams and all the men of SGI-USA. I'm sure that together, we will create a wonderful record of growth and advancement in the year 2000 and beyond. Thank you very much.

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